



Responses to “frequently asked questions”: August 2020; first edition

In specific terms, what are the mandatory safety measures required for entering the school building—for students, staff, parents and visitors?

There are Daily Health Screenings for all students, faculty and staff. Each morning prior to coming to campus: there will be specific protocols for personal health checking for all staff and students as well as pre-screening questions that parents will need to address; the screening process will be supervised by our full-time nurse, Marci Franciose. Each morning before entry to campus: all staff and students will have temperature checks and all adults will be required to respond to our Covid-19 daily questionnaire; parents will not be allowed to enter campus buildings. Specific protocols will be established for all visitors to campus. Primary division children will arrive at the annex building; primary and lower school children will be dismissed from the annex entrance. There will be specific arrival (and dismissal) protocols and requirements that have been finalized and seek to ensure distancing; optimize daily health screening protocols; and provide orderly arrival and dismissal routines so that we can make sure we avoid over-crowding and maintain appropriate physical distancing at all times.

Face Coverings: Face coverings are required for faculty, staff, students, and visitors while on campus. In addition, face shields will be made available and for some children and staff could serve as an additional protective device. Face shields are not considered to be substitutes for masks and may only be worn in addition to the face covering (i.e. mask). We are further researching appropriate alternatives to the mask that might be necessitated for medical reasons.

Physical Distancing: All classrooms and spaces are currently being modified with the mandate of 6 feet of distance between all faculty, staff, students at all times. We have been successful at achieving this goal. Vigorous and regular hand-washing at specifically staged hand-washing stations will become a schoolwide norm.

Compliance: Recognizing that safety measures are only as effective as the compliance strategy, who is responsible for enforcing and tracking compliance?

The responsibility for assuring compliance, enforcing and tracking compliance will lie with the school nurse, Head of School, Main Office supervisor, as well as the division heads. There will be a close and constant communication channel with the Department of Health when there are questions, concerns and compliance requirements that need immediate clarification. The Head of School alongside the division heads will be responsible for regular and immediate communication with all members of the Winston community when there are outbreaks, concerns over possible outbreaks and other matters related to the Covid-19 crisis.

What happens when a person does not meet the criteria to enter the school building?

If a person does not meet the criteria so established for entering the school building—whether this be student or staff member—they will be required to go home. Note: students and staff are being asked to do their personal “pre-screenings” at home prior to arriving at school; the school will do the screening process in person only if parents have not submitted their daily Covid-19 questionnaire—that will be posted so that parents can submit electronically prior to arriving at school each morning. The process of screening worked effectively and efficiently during the summer program. The updated health screening questionnaire we are using has been developed by the NJ Department of Health in its recent publication of guidelines.

What happens when a person fails to wear a mask or maintain their distance?

Face coverings are required for all students and staff at all times while at school; however, we have found during the recent summer program that it was vital to have children and adults go outside regularly to loosen their masks while maintaining physical distancing. We have created stations outside that have tent coverings for inclement weather outdoor movement.

In addition, physical distancing of six feet is a requirement within the classroom setting and on campus in all areas—including outside. Supervision and reminders will be persistent.

What happens if a parent perceives the school's policies as overly restrictive or difficult and voices their concerns?

Parents had been informed of school policies and protocols for the summer program and are being fully informed for the regular school year that the regulations we have and the standard protocols and procedures are not open for negotiation. We experienced 100 per cent compliance from parents and from students during the summer program over the five weeks. Bottom line: a mask properly affixed is an absolute requirement for being at school and being around other people.

Who is responsible for purchasing and wearing PPE for staff and students?

Many Winston staff have been responsible for purchasing PPE and arranging for the appropriate cleaning and sanitizing of the school buildings and classrooms. There are plenty of additional masks available although we have found that most families and staff are supplying their own face coverings. During the summer program, we also equipped each child upon entry with a personal hand sanitizer tube; there are stations throughout the school buildings with additional hand sanitizer dispensers and there are touchless hand sanitizer dispensers as well as touchless soap dispensers in bathrooms. The hand-drying machines in the bathrooms have been deactivated. We will have additional plastic water containers available for students throughout the day although we ask parents to send their children to school each day with a plastic (disposable) water bottle. The water fountains and the water filling devices have been deactivated.

Will there be extra PPE available when someone (teachers, staff, students) needs it?

YES! We already have a large supply of PPE and these are readily available to all staff and to students.

What is the protocol for drinking water during school?

The water fountains are not usable and have been deactivated. Water drinking is via separate plastic bottles of water that the school will supply in part; because of the volume of water bottles necessary, we are asking parents to send their child into school each day with a disposable water bottle. Students will be able to drink while maintaining physical distancing of six feet.

How will social distancing and PPE be handled for lunch and in classrooms when students and teachers can't wear masks to eat/drink?

As per department of health guidelines and CDC guidelines, children eating lunch will need to eat and drink without a face covering. However, there will be three options for lunch: supervised lunch in the separate classrooms where students remain physically distanced and when having to move from their seat will be required to affix their face coverings properly. The other options are: the use of our gym for lunch where students can be arranged—fully physically distanced at 6-8 feet—at separate desks or tables; the use of the outside areas under tents that have been set up to ensure appropriate physical distancing. We are asking that students bring their lunches to school in disposable brown paper bags. Upon completion of lunch, students will throw away their lunch bags in trash receptacles. The school is also working closely with the “Simply Gourmet” lunch service on suitable and safely and smartly packed lunch alternatives for purchase. We will work with students in protecting their masks during lunch-time for continued use when moving about (i.e. to go to the rest-room or throw away garbage) and after lunch.

What happens when someone tests positive for COVID-19 ? Would in-person schooling pause and for how long?

In the case of a community member (student, staff, family member) contracting Covid-19, school would “pause,” staff would evaluate the specific situation and circumstances, and we would pivot potentially to full remote instruction, or close the school for a designated period of time, or quarantine specific individuals (students and staff) for a specific time-frame. However, in all circumstances, we would follow specific local Department of Health guidelines and advice when there is a confirmed outbreak; the length of the “pause” would be determined by the Department of Health and be based on its evaluation of the particular situation.

There would be Winston contact tracing provided to the department of health for further evaluation and guidance. Hence, it is clear that our school's ability to move immediately and even abruptly to a remote platform for a series of days or weeks will be essential for us to prepare for.

Does every student and teacher who have been exposed then have to quarantine?

There are many difficult determinations that have received various interpretations and we will have Winston abide by Department of Health guidance and the nurse's determination on how to proceed. We will also communicate immediately with the full community as to what has happened and what will happen over time.

Do teachers and parents all get notified who is infected and when?

YES—but I provide this provision; whenever possible, we will want to protect the confidentiality of students and staff members who are infected. The guidance I have received, therefore, is to note that a person infected is in a particular class and when it is absolutely necessary we would share the specific name of the student or staff member.

What happens when someone exhibits symptoms of COVID-19?

It is clearly stated already in our paperwork that anyone with a suggestion of symptoms should stay home; and if the symptoms persist, then get tested. The issue of testing is a challenging one since access to testing (and getting results in a timely fashion) have remained problematic.

Would school continue as normal until a positive or negative test result?

This question is a good one but hard to answer in a simple way; the Covid-19 exposure could be primary, secondary or tertiary through the various contacts. We would immediately ask for guidance from the department of health and basically err on the side of caution (by potentially going fully remote for a few days or for weeks) based on the scientific explanations and guidance received.

How often are teachers and students required to be tested?

This is a great question and I do not have the answer. I think it is a good idea that all staff be tested regularly but I will be posing this question to the department of health. Many experts say that a test is not necessary unless there are specific symptoms being demonstrated. Similarly, I am not sure what schools are being asked to do—or what is recommended for students in the way of initial or regular testing. As with other questions that I do not have an answer for at present, I will pose this to our nurse who in turn will seek advice from the department of health.

Do teachers and students need to wait for results before returning to school in person?

We had a situation this summer when a staff member felt she/he had symptoms; and as a result, we concluded it was best to get tested, and await the formal results before coming back to the school building. I would endorse this position for the regular school year and trust that staff members and Winston families will be honest, engage in discussion, ask for professional advice, and make appropriate decisions and faithfully follow school protocols and recommendations—always “erring” on the side of caution when in doubt.

What are the school’s plans for cleaning and disinfecting the building?

For the current summer program, we have in place already a major cleaning and sanitizing protocol based on every standard and recommendation that has been published. There are limitations recommended for “over-sanitizing” and we will take every precaution for nightly as well as during the day cleaning. There are protocols already developed for regular cleaning and sanitizing; and there are protocols and procedures in place for cleaning and sanitizing when there is an outbreak or a suspected outbreak of infection. Our “new” cleaners are good; competent and able to provide a variety of services based on events and situations as they occur. The all-school Friday remote day will allow us to fully sanitize the building each long weekend when there are no people in the buildings.

Would there be a deep cleaning/disinfection or a minimum period prior to authorizing return (after an outbreak)?

We are taking a completely prudent and aggressive course based on the level of the infection on campus, and the elements of primary, secondary or tertiary contacts. There are specific guidelines provided by the cleaning companies and suppliers as to appropriate treatments and the regularity of such treatments.

How often will the building be cleaned throughout the day?

Our school custodian, Mr. Ishmael Khan will be moving throughout the school building during all school hours; and there will be additional janitorial support made available.

Every classroom will be fully equipped with readily accessible “cleaning kits.”

What type of counseling support will be available for students, parents and teachers?

Our school counselor, Reshma Patel will be on campus each day, Monday through Thursday, and will be working remotely on Fridays. Our nurse will also be a source of assistance throughout the school day in a health advisory capacity for students, parents and staff.

If kids are changing classroom, who will clean the desks/classroom between each class? Will someone be wiping down desks before a student goes into each class?

When students are changing classrooms, we will have our recently hired "second custodian, cleaner), Mr. Ishmael and classroom teachers prepared to wipe down desks, chairs and do general sanitizing before another group comes in. We are minimizing student movement between classes through our schedule (through double periods, student “pods” and there will be extremely limited access to lockers and cubbies).

How are you separating kids in the classrooms?

Maximum class sizes (i.e. number of students and staff) will be based on the physical distance mandate to maintain 6 feet distancing at all times; and students will wear face coverings at all times; students may opt to also wear a face shield similar to what various teachers will be wearing—in addition to a face covering. Face shields, as noted, are not a substitute for the face covering mandate. We have plenty of face shields and face coverings available.

Books and supplies? Will students carry their own in their backpacks?

We have eliminated all common "touch" areas with school supplies and materials; thus students will be carrying their personal supplies in their back-packs and all personal supplies (i.e. pencils, pens, papers) and books will not be shared with others. Digital books are always available.

Dismissal and arrival procedures

Dismissal and arrival procedures will be clearly stated before school starts so as to maintain distancing requirements; allow for orderly check-ins and temperature checks each morning (and asking the Covid-19 questionnaire that we will do daily and have on-line for parents to submit before children come to school). These pre-entry protocols are in effect for the summer program that is now completing its fourth week of successful operation. We will ask parents to arrive in the mornings at appointed times so we are prepared to have staff greet and check children and then have students report to a designated classroom--and maintain full distancing with face coverings at all times.

Specials (art, music, PE)?

There will be various "specials" happening during the regular school day. Many specials will also be done remotely on Friday's all-school remote days. There will be regular physical movement and creative exercise, but physical activities will be done, for the most part, outside and there will never be a bunching or congregating of students or staff.

Will there be markers on the floor in the building for kids to use?

YES--six feet distancing at all times--and markers and directional signs are installed already from the summer program that mark the appropriate distances. Hallways will be carefully monitored and we will not have groups of children congregating--thus, the schedule of classes and movements of students and staff are similarly scheduled with precision. The number of students in each class will be determined by the physical distancing standard of 6 feet distance; thus, in the MS: 4-7 students is a standard; we can accommodate 10 plus students at one time in the gym and in the Lower School suite and MS suite downstairs. All in all, socializing will necessarily be minimized during lunch. Bathroom use will be structured and closely monitored and cleaning and sanitizing in the bathroom areas will be constant throughout the day.

Will there be tents set up in outside areas?

We are in the process of installing multiple tents in various areas of the outside: near the primary school annex building; over the picnic tables; and at other key areas of the outside. There will be ample spaces provided with full physical distancing requirements met for lunch; mask removal relief; and outdoor classes.

What are the anticipated remote learning platform protocols?

in Our sincere goal is to make the "remote" experience inclusive and connected with each classroom teacher--thus the intent is to have all the classes "live streamed" or connected via google meet. We want children not "in person" on campus to feel connected to their classmates and to their teachers. The key is being "live" and thus we have already begun the process of installation of specialized cameras for live streaming of teachers in the classrooms addition to the familiar "google meet" platform.

How many students will be working remotely at the start of the school year?

I anticipate that about 5% of our students will be working remotely to begin the school year--and this could increase or decrease based on many conversations with parents. We are gearing up now for our formal orientations with teachers, and then students and parents--and we will do these orientations remotely. Classroom teachers will be instructing students both in-person and remotely at the same time.

What about ventilation and air sanitizing systems on campus with “HEPA” filters?

Particularly because of the generous cash donations of Winston community members, Winston has fully evaluated ventilation systems to ensure they are operating properly and provide more than more than acceptable indoor air quality.

Winston has implemented strategies to enhance indoor air quality through Increased frequency of filter replacement along with full upgrades of all filters in HVAC systems.

Winston has already installed portable HEPA-filtered, “Dayton” air sanitation systems for classrooms and hallways—with devices intended to sanitize the air on a 24-hour basis; along with numerous sanitizing devices (normally used in hospitals and ambulances) that also have UV-30 lighting capabilities.

Final note to parents and students:

Please continue to send me via e-mail (plewis@winstonschool.org) your questions since the following compilation of questions comes from the many conversations I have had over the past month with parents, students and staff. They are helpful, pertinent and illuminating.

Respectfully submitted:

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